



MATERIALS RECOVERY FACILITIES (MRFs)

Materials Recovery Facilities or MRFs (pronounced 'merfs') are plants specially designed to separate, process and store recyclables that have been collected either separately from general waste (called a 'clean' MRF) or with it (a 'dirty' MRF). MRFs ensure recyclables are of a good marketable quality and free of contaminants. They play an important role in society, striving toward higher recycling levels, therefore creating larger environmental benefits.

After the recyclables are collected, through kerbside collections or drop-off points, the materials are sorted either by hand picking or automatic sieving. The recyclables first go through the trommel, a large cylindrical sieve allowing the bottles and cans to fall through the sieve onto a conveyor belt, while paper and cardboard move through the trommel onto another conveyor belt.

Various magnets and electric fields are used to pick up metals, while people are employed to sort the different plastics, glass and cartons.

All of these materials are then sent for recycling, either within or out of Australia, where they are cleaned, melted or shredded before being reprocessed into further products. Many of the items you recycle have already been through this process, continuing the loop from shop, to house, to recycling, to the MRF, being reprocessed, back to the shop and so on.

Not all councils have their own MRFs, as they are often shared and are state-of-the-art technological facilities. MRFs provide an integral step in remanufacturing materials, recovering and saving resources, and closing the loop on recycling.

WHAT CAN I DO?

- Purchase items made from recycled material as this provides a good market for items collected. By buying recycled, you are truly recycling.
- Recycle items correctly! Only dispose of the materials listed as recyclable in your area at both drop off collection centres and kerbside collections. Do not contaminate your recycling with hazardous materials, landfill waste, furniture or building materials. If you are unsure what is recyclable in your area, go to www.recyclingnearyou.com.au or ask at your local council.
- If you want to see first hand how a MRF works, contact your local council. Many MRF's offer tours offer free tours to schools and interested community members.

MORE INFORMATION

- <http://www.envirocom.com.au/gcwaste/recycle.htm> - This site includes a great virtual tour of a MRF
- <http://www.skmrecycling.com/content/mrf.html> - includes information on the importing and exporting of recyclable materials
- <http://www.integra.org.uk/facts/extrafacts/materials.html> - provides a good summary of MRF issues